From: Jon 'maddog' Hall, Executive Director, Linux International
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 12/28/01 12:47pm
Subject: Additional comment and proposals for Microsoft/Open Source solution

80 Amherst St.
Amherst, NH 03031-3032 USA

Honorable Colleen Kollar-Kotelly
U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia

Your Honor,

I am writing in support of the change to Microsoft's penalties as
proposed by Mr. Matthew Suzlik, CEO of Red Hat Software, Inc. As
a former programmer and educator with over thirty years of
experience in the computer industry, I feel that Mr. Suzlik's
proposal of replacing the over-priced, closed-source Microsoft
software with Open Source GPL'ed software has real merit.

However, I have some additional comments and suggestions to
further increase the benefit/function of his proposal.

Mr. Suzlik correctly points out that his proposal would increase
the number of systems from 200000 to over 1 million. From my
understanding of the original proposal, the total amount of the
punitive measure was about two billion dollars. I also
understand that a lot of the computer equipment was to be
"refurbished" equipment, which would do little or nothing to
strengthen the economy. At today's equipment prices, I would
encourage this course of action:

Generate a Request for Quote for a hardware vendor to produce one or two
fixed models which would give basic multimedia desktop or server capabilities
to the school systems, almost at manufacturer's cost. The schools
would then be free to order these machines from this list of
systems. If the manufacturer did not have to pay the Microsoft
licensing fees, I believe that the cost of these computers would
be able to deliver basic multimedia functionality to close to 2
million computers, not the one million that Mr. Suzlik estimates,
and at a cost less than it would be to collect, recondition and
redistribute refurbished models.

These units would then have a consistent set of hardware that
would make it easier for both Red Hat Software to support the
operating system, and easier for the school districts to support
the hardware in the long run. The use of new hardware will also

typically generate a longer warranty from the manufacturer then the use of refurbished hardware also. I am sure that the hardware companies will work very hard to generate the best possible bid on this contract, both for the amount of systems it represents, and for the publicity that they will get in being part of this solution.

The building of these new machines, rather than the refurbishing of the older machines, would help to create jobs needed at this time in the economy. While refurbishing machines also generates jobs, it is not guaranteed that the number of refurbished machines would allow a consistent set of hardware across the entire program, nor with a consistent warranty and replacement program.

A second comment that I have on Mr. Suzlik's proposal is that the Open Source software that he is suggesting be used has a benefit to the students in the school system that Microsoft's code does not provide. While both sets of software allow the students to browse the web, write papers, use spreadsheets, and do other tasks a student has to do in education, only the Open Source code allows the student to see HOW these tasks are done.

As a former college professor, I would have given my eye teeth to have an operating system like Linux to teach operating system design, or compiler suites like GNU (which come with all Linux distributions) to show students how compilers are actually written. I would have been overwhelmed with joy to have a database system like MySQL or Postgres to show my students now only how to use and manage a sophisticated database, but how they worked inside. This can be done with Open Source software, but can not be done with closed source, proprietary software like Microsoft's.

But today Open Source software goes beyond just operating systems, compilers and database engines, and if you go out to the place on the net called "SourceForge" (www.sourceforge.net) you will find over 30,000 projects with over 300,000 people working on them. These projects cover almost every area of academic pursuit, and the use and encouragement of Open Source software would allow these students in the "fourteen poorest school districts in the United States" to work along side other students from all over the world. Perhaps some of these students from these poorer school districts would get their work recognized and publicized, increasing their self-confidence, not only in the areas of computer science, but biology, mathematics, physics and other areas where the United States is beginning to lag other countries.

Finally, I would like to point out that in a lot of these poorer
school districts there exist already some local Linux user groups
nearby that might be willing to act as "sponsors" and "angels"
for this program, to provide support and help for these
districts, in addition to what Red Hat would provide.

If you need any additional information in considering
this proposal, please feel free to contact me at the address
given above, or the telephone numbers give below.

Warmest regards,

Jon A. Hall
Executive Director

--
===
===
Jon "maddog" Hall
Executive Director   Linux International(SM)
email: maddog@li.org   80 Amherst St.
Voice: +1.603.672.4557   Amherst, N.H. 03031-3032 U.S.A.
WWW: http://www.li.org

Board Member: Uniforum Association, USENIX Association

(R)Linux is a registered trademark of Linus Torvalds in several countries.
(SM)Linux International is a service mark of Linux International, Inc.

CC: maddog@li.org@inetgw